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INDEPENDENCE.

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SECOND

ANNUAL SERMON,

PREACHED TO THE

13th REGIMENT, N. G. S. N. Y.,

IN THE

South Congregational Church,

BROOKLYN, N. Y.,

ON SABBATH EVENING, DECEMBER 9TH, 1866,



BY ITS CHAPLAIN,

REV. EDWARD TAYLOR,

PASTOR OF THE SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

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BROOKLYN:

BOARD OF OFFICERS, 13TH REG'T, N. G. S. N. Y

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INDEPENDENCE.

"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the laws which Moses my servant commanded thee : turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest."—JOSHUA, 1, 7.

COMRADES OF THE THIRTEENTH !

Cheered by your cordial response to the invitation of your Chaplain to attend Divine service in this temple of God last year, and by your respectful and sympathetic attention to the discourse then preached, I have renewed the invitation ; and in behalf, not only of myself, but of the congregation stately worshiping here, I bid you all a fraternal *welcome*.

My design in this invitation is two-fold.

First.—To do honor to our citizen soldiery.

Many, especially since those fearful riots, have been ready to award them their meed of praise as conservators of the public peace ; but a higher value attaches to a regiment constituted like your own, in that it is a Military Normal school, self-supporting, in which men are being trained into fitness to officer armies necessary in times of war ; so that the men in your ranks are not

so much enrolled privates as so many cadets in drill for possible contingencies. Hence an importance attaches to the Thirteenth, and to similar regiments, which it is difficult rightly to appreciate.

But, secondly, and *mainly*, my design is to fulfill the functions of my office by stimulating that intellectual and spiritual culture without which one cannot be the highest type of a soldier and a man. Once it was unblushingly affirmed that the "worst men made the best soldiers;" but those who said it never made a correct analysis of the elements that are essential to the true warrior. Not more essential is well-tempered steel to the sword blade than a well-tempered character to him who wields it. The error is exploded.

I purpose this evening to present to your consideration one of these elements. Before doing so, however, one or two matters of regimental interest may properly claim a notice. Since our last similar gathering we have been deprived of the services of a commander* whose "unvarying courtesy and high-toned honor as a gentlemen, whose excellence as a soldier, whose unquestioned fidelity as a friend, whose impartiality, kindness, and painstaking as an officer" have won our highest esteem. But we are favored with a competent successor in one,† who entering the military service of the United States in the capacity of Major of the Fourteenth (N. Y.) regiment, and continuing in that arduous service during most of the long years of the late protracted and bloody struggle, has been worthily promoted

*Col. J. B. WOODWARD.

†Brev. Maj. Gen. JAMES JOURDAN.

from grade to grade till the double stars adorn the shoulder; whose qualities as a gentleman and an officer united with an unobtrusive, unselfish and devoted patriotism, furnish every requisite for the position he has done us the honor to accept.

Though some of our members are to-night sleeping, in the body, the sleep that knows no waking till the trump of God shall stir the sheeted dead, I gratefully acknowledge the Divine goodness in the general preservation of the regiment from sickness and death, and especially that the watch-care of the Great Father has been over our daughter, who this evening meets with you, her parents by adoption. It is a pleasant thought that our commander was an intimate friend of her father, who laid himself an offering upon the altar of his country, and so can not fail to feel a tender regard for the orphaned child of his fallen comrade.

And now to our theme;—INDEPENDENCE IN THINKING AND IN A CORRESPONDING PRACTICE.

The Holy Scriptures furnish types of all characters, and specimens of all characteristics; in them we find a gallery of portraiture unequalled elsewhere. Joshua, the great Captain of Israel, is a fine example of an independent man. No man could have appreciated such an exhortation as we have in our text whose soul did not have the true ring. The Divine Government is an economical one; there is no waste in it; and a commission so nervously worded would have been wasted upon a man whose character was not fibrous. Young men, listen! and apply these sentiments to

yourselves. "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded thee; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest."

Much is said about Independence which shows that the speakers have not correct ideas of what Independence is. How many disreputable deeds have been sheltered beneath that abused word! Vice ever pays this tribute to virtue, that it seeks to christen its progeny with reputable names. Sometimes we see advertisements in which some good citizen assures the public that the individual charged with such and such an offense is not himself but another one who has a similar name. But in the case of Independence there is a worse trial, for its name is stolen by all sorts of violators of good taste and morals. So in order to say what Independence is, we must first say what it is not. And

I. Independence is not *obstinacy*.

Perseverance differs from obstinacy in this; the former is a strong *will*, the latter a strong *wont*. Many pride themselves upon being independent simply because they have a strong *wont*. If their estimates are correct, then mules are very independent. Back-bones are useful; a poor concern would a human body be without a back-bone. But how much better off would it be if the back-bone were one straight, inflexible piece? To be useful, it must be vertebrated. Independence is back-bone, but back-bone with joints in it.

II. Independence is not *recklessness*.

The life of recklessness is the “*don’t care*” spirit. That is a blind spirit. Some think that if they do violence to a cultivated sense of what is true and beautiful, if they go forward over a road made of the proprieties they have crushed, if they become indifferent to the estimates other people may have of them, if they become reckless of social and moral restraints, if they can swagger and act the braggadocio, they are thus independent. They are mistaken; they were never before so chained; if they would use their tongues less and their ears more, they would hear the clank of their fetters. Independence is not reckless; it *does* care; it is thoughtful, deliberate; it is discriminating; with an unerring eye for the detection of shams, it combines a wonderful sensibility to every genuine form of truth and beauty. Its possessor “*don’t care*,” and he does care. For the flippant, for tinselry, for ostentation, for sounding brass, for varnish, he “*don’t care*:” but for the substantial, for the pure metal, for the sensible, for the firm fibre and the true grain, he does care. He compels action to hold the stirrup for thought, and his motto is,—“*A wise look-over may save from a fatal over-look.*”

III. Independence does not consist in being *disagreeable*.

Some who most assume it, manifest their false ideas of the virtue by evincing a purpose to be at cross-points with the world. They are ill-mannered in their modes, dogmatic in their statements, and offensive in their

words. They seem not to know how to be intelligent without being opinionated; they thrust their peculiarities impertinently into the faces of their neighbors; they do not seek good, but notoriety, and they get it. They are nothing unless disagreeable, and by their own standard, they are much. The very fact that their ways shock good taste is to them a reason for continuing them; one of them smokes in the front door of a crowded street car and answers appealing or reproachful looks with a glance, half chuckling, half defiant, that says, "I'll let all these disgusted people in the ears know that I am a man that does as I please." He lives his creed, "Nothing unless a nuisance." Yet his consistency is to a lie; for he affirms the right to be unnecessarily disagreeable and there is *no* such right; his is a declaration, not of independence but of impudence.

The creed of the truly independent person is, "*I have no right to do as I please, unless I please to do right;*" hence, he is never unnecessarily disagreeable, because he is guided by the right, which is a sure pilot to the observance of that most accurate definition of politeness—the Golden Rule.

IV. It is not necessarily a mark of independence to differ from other people.

There are those who express dissatisfaction with what is—why? They will not allow it, but the reason is—because it is. With them

"Old things are over old
And new not new enough."

They "would be voices, not echoes;" they are "opposed to running in ruts;" they triumphantly ask, "How is one to show himself independent, if he falls in with old notions and goes with the crowd?" Hence, they seek to startle by enunciating novelties; they advance "peculiar views." Now, if these views were peculiarly good we would not take exception, but they are quite apt to be peculiarly bad. Opinions commonly received may not be true, but their common reception is no proof that they are not true. Where men have had the means of judging and are under no violent prejudices, their general acceptance of an opinion, especially if it has abided the test of centuries, is not proof, but it is presumptive argument of its truth. It is no more a mark of independence to differ from the world, unless the world is wrong, than it would be for a passenger to leave a staunch Cunard steamer bound straight for Liverpool, and undertake to paddle himself in one of the boats to that port. He would get no compliments for his originality, but much contempt for his folly. So one who abandons ideas, not because investigation shows them erroneous, but because they have been long and generally entertained, cannot thereby have his claims to independence allowed. A little boat in mid-ocean headed for Liverpool is better than a huge steamer headed for the bottom of the sea, but in order to pass for a sensible man its occupant must show cause for being in such a craft. The long concurrence of wise and good men in a sentiment, while in itself no conclusive proof of its truth, entitles that sentiment to at least a peculiarly careful examination. Instead of such concurrence being a suspicion of error, it is a presumption

of truth. Some of these men are candid, wise and good, and they have brought scholarly culture, trained minds and pure hearts to thorough examinations of this subject, and their conclusions ought to hold till overturned by deductions not less intelligent. Yet, how many seem ambitious of securing a reputation for independent thinking, merely through differing from others, simply by beating a new path, no matter whence or whither. They affect to despise cant and still use such stale, cant terms as "blinded by prejudice," "afraid to come out," "priest-ridden," to designate the adherents of the established views. They mistake the nature of true independence: it does not consist in differing from other people, in going alone, in forsaking well-beaten highways, but in rejecting error: it consists, *not in thinking otherwise, but in thinking correctly.* These remarks hold good in an especial manner with respect to religious subjects, for they are apt to be treated by the class referred to with peculiar unfairness. No student deems it a mark of wisdom to cavil at mathematical axioms or to deny the multiplication table, or to battle scientific data carefully established. In the domains of religion certain moral truths are as fully established as are these mathematical facts, and he, who cavils at or denies them, proclaims, not his independence, but his folly;--he does but do battle against postulates, axioms, and the multiplication table and gets a roll in the dust and a shivered lance, in which is no glory.

5. It is not Independence to *depart from the true laws of thought and action.*

While we are obligated to think, we are not obliged to think wildly. There is a law of freedom ; this is it, "Perfect freedom is the result of perfect obedience to a perfect law." Freedom is lost where this law is violated. A measure of restraint is essential to free motion. The planet swings free in its orbit only when held by the law of gravitation ; the kite soars high in the skies only while held by the cord ; cut the cord and the kite does not fly higher but is dashed to the ground. The locomotive rolls freely and fleetly along the track only while the wheel is bound by the flange to the rail ; break the flange and the ponderous machine lies by the wayside powerless as Sampson shorn of his locks. They do but dream who think of standing alone ; there is no such thing as absolute independence. It is said that in a mill at Lawrence there is a piece of mechanism which carries two hundred threads, and if one be broken the whole instantly stops. This will illustrate the interdependence of human beings ; they are linked together, and, most of all, to God, by many threads ; and one broken line affects all.

We live in a world of correlates. The recognition of this fact is essential to independence. How absurd, then, in infidels to call Christians "credulous and shackled," and themselves "free thinkers." *They* are chain bound ; *they* are shackled ; *they* trample upon all the laws of evidence ; *they* seek not truth but the negation of truth ; for them the centripetal force is destroyed and they no longer delightfully circle the throne of God, but wander into darkness and confusion. They are not independent, *they drift !*

Having shown what is not independence, we are prepared for its definition. The *essence of independence consists in having all our powers and faculties under the control of a vigorous will, directed by an absolute sense of duty.* It follows that the independent man must be a man of character. As the ability of the oak to resist the wrench of storms arises from the toughness of its fibres and the grasp and spread of its tenacious roots, so he must needs be fibrous with truth and firmly rooted in the right. Such a man is superior to circumstances; he can stand in all weathers. He can say, with William Penn, when threatened with imprisonment if he continued to practice his principles, "Well, friend, thy strength shall never equal my patience," and so show himself the stronger; with Socrates, "They may kill me, but they can not hurt me"; with many Scripture worthies, "We are more than conquerors through Him that hath loved us." Such an independence, young men, the holy religion of the Bible and of Jesus Christ, its most illustrious exemplar, creates; it furnishes every element essential to it; it conserves as well as creates. Sin is wasteful; it fast depletes the strength and scatters the elements of power, for "the thief in the candle wasteth more wax than the wick thereof." A free, firm mind, based upon the Bible, is a noble spectacle. "It does not take on a new opinion in such a way as to give the appearance of a huge wen or tumor, but so as to increase in strength and symmetry, as when healthy flesh is acquired." And, what is more, it can withstand the wild onsets of innovation and not be swept away. A stouter heart and a brawnier arm are required to stem the "floods of ungodly

men" than to swim fast and far with the stream of corruption. Such nerve and brawn Christianity gives, whose holy founder, the God-man, was the only perfect specimen of independence the world has ever seen. I exhort you to the cultivation of a manly, righteous independence. There is too little of it. Men are being constantly hampered and led about and made to do that which offends their judgment, taste and moral sentiment. We too much build houses, dress, vote, live and regulate our social customs to suit other people rather than ourselves. Too many young men evince an infirm spirit by allowing themselves to be enticed away from places and pursuits approved by conscience, into objectionable scenes, slavishly allowing another to decide for them. They lack the nerve to snap the cord. It is right to be influenced by another to good, but not to ill.

The motives to the culture of a spirit of Christian independence are many and mighty. Such a spirit promotes an honorable character ; it gives stability ; it wins respect. The good withhold their respect from a vacillating, imbecile person, because they are *not* sure of him ; the bad because they *are*. It increases usefulness ; it makes a robust will ; it invigorates the conscience power; it plants one in safety. One of our brave boys in blue, on guard against the strongest fort of the rebels at Pittsburgh at a time when a struggle was evidently at hand, being asked what he thought would be the result, nobly replied: "If they come to this fort, we'll repulse them ; if we go to that fort, *we'll take it, for God is with us!*" So, young men, keep right

on in the straight path, and if you are assailed by the powers of darkness you will repulse them; and if you storm a strong-hold you will take it, *for God will be with you!*

As the world advances toward the millennial glory, more and more will it appear that great deeds are deeds of patriotism, and humanity and piety; that great men are not those of long ancestral line, of hereditary possessions, of titled names, of heraldic insignia, but men whose hearts throb, not with the pride of a lordly lineage and with the blood of an imperial race, but with the love of liberty and of right, and with the blood of man as man; men who are great in their *goodness*. An American gentleman lately on London Bridge met a volunteer regiment returning from drill, marching at ease with rifles slung over their shoulders. They were singing, first one company and then another, catching up the refrain which swelled every now and then along the whole column. As the head of the column drew near he recognized that American song of freedom, the "Glory, Hallelujah." So while the Irish at Dublin were awaiting the arrival of John Bright to address them, they sang the "Glory, Hallelujah!" Humble in its origin, the inspiring refrain goes marching on; and while the great Captain will order those whose grandeur is but of earth to "halt," the souls of the good will ever be marching on. The day is coming when for every one who shall seek in Westminister Abbey the last home of him whose title was his chief commendation, hundreds will make loving pilgrimages to some wild mountain spot and drink in strength of soul over

the green turf that will cover all that could die of some martyr, whose soul was too sturdy to bow to a lie. Young men, be ambitious to be great in goodness.

And now, before we part let us solemnly speak the names of our four comrades, who, since our last assembly here, have answered to the roll-call of death.

Private Lindsey F. Rozell, of Co. "H," died last spring, so soon after joining the regiment that but few of you were acquainted with him. He was an unmarried man, and about twenty-one years of age.

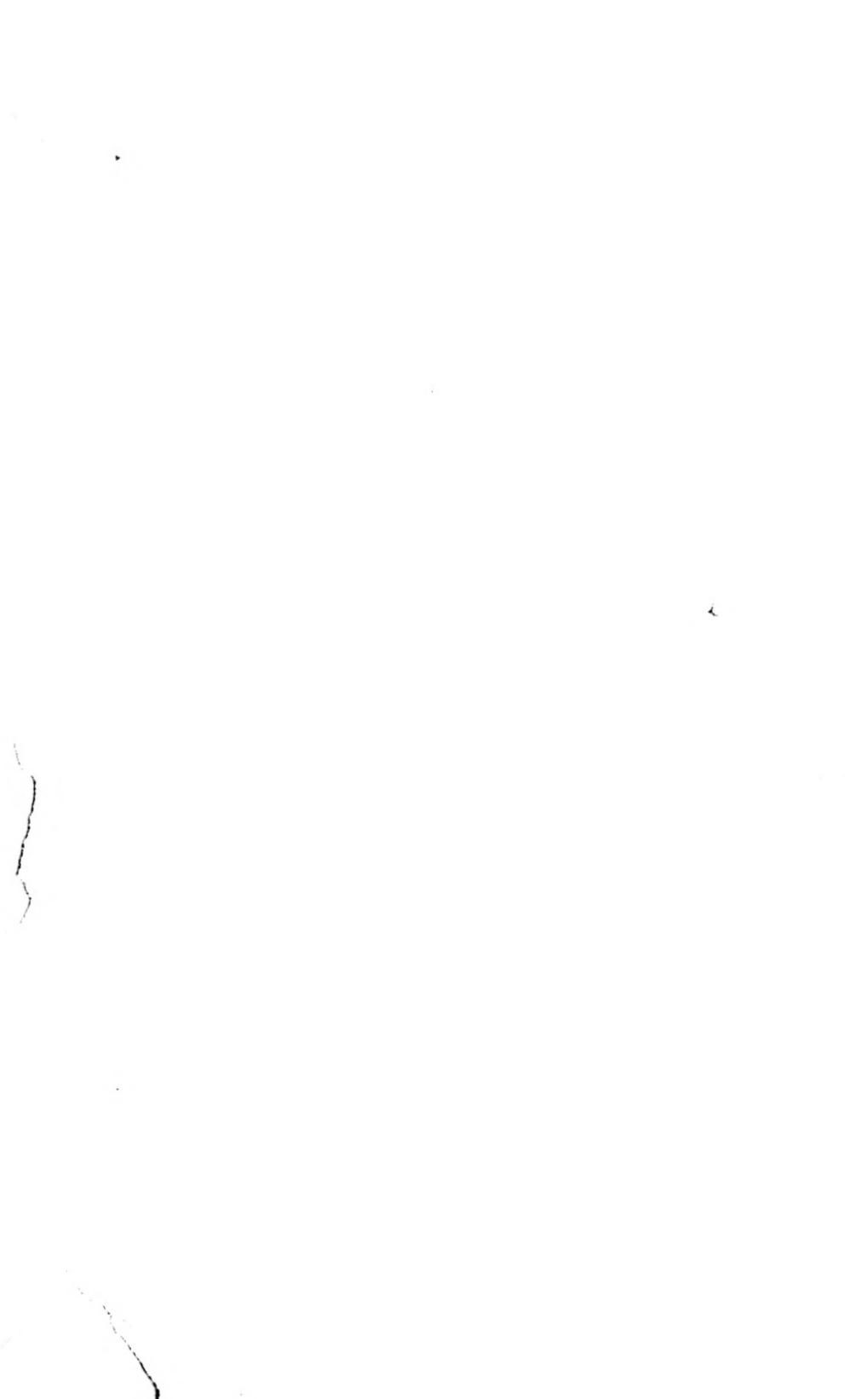
Private M. S. Edwards, who joined Co. "D" in 1864, last July died of cholera, leaving a wife and two children.

Private Joseph C. Smith, who joined Co. "F," in November, 1866, was a single man about twenty years of age. Early in the recent war he enlisted in the U. S. Army and was discharged at the return of peace. Coming home, he made the acquaintance of a man, who, in the guise of friendship, persuaded Smith to entrust to him for safe investment the few hundreds of dollars he had saved of his pay. His pretended friend proved to be a villain, and, failing in every effort to recover his money, poor Smith, in a moment of despondency and desperation, on the 27th of March last, shot himself dead.

Corporal Edward B. Benedict joined Co. "H," January 14th, 1862, and during the summer of that year served with you at Suffolk, Va. Upon his return, he

accepted a position on the staff of Brig.-Gen. Jackson, then on recruiting duty at Hart's Island. He afterwards joined the army of the Tennessee and marched with Sherman from Atlanta to the sea, being at times charged with most responsible missions from one portion of the army to another through the enemy's country. At the close of the war his constitution was undermined by consumption, to which he was hereditarily disposed, and in the hope of regaining health he visited Minnesota. But it was too late. He died there in May last, leaving a wife and three or four children to mourn their irreparable loss. He was well spoken of in every respect.

My comrades: The roll-call of death proceeds; it will not cease till, one by one, we all shall have answered to our names. Are we ready? Let us live wisely and well, let us penitently trust in Christ crucified for the pardon of all our many sins, and we will be ready; and that which I have denominated the roll-call of death will be in truth the roll-call of Life Everlasting. AMEN.



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